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**Mary Anne Hitt, Contributor**

Director of the Sierra Club Beyond Coal Campaign

# Save The Environmental Protection Agency!

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AMERICAN FEDERATION OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES

Beyond Coal director Mary Anne Hitt speaks at a September 13, 2017, press conference about ensuring the EPA can do its job

This week, I had the great honor of speaking at press conference at the National Press Club calling on Congress and the White House to fully fund the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and let its staff do their jobs free of political interference (you can watch ABC News coverage of the event [here](#)). The good public servants at EPA stand up every day for the health of our families, clean air and water, and our climate. The least I could do was to stand with them, and call on Congress and the White House to save the US EPA!

The press conference also included Rep. Debbie Dingell of Michigan, National Wildlife Federation CEO Collin O'Mara, and leaders of the American Federation of Government Employees, which represents EPA staff. I want to share the message I delivered at the press conference with all of you - here are my remarks:

In my role as director of the Beyond Coal campaign of Sierra Club, I work with with families all across the nation who've been directly affected by coal pollution - from parents of kids with asthma to entire neighborhoods with contaminated drinking water. All of those families look to the Environmental Protection Agency as their best defense - to let them know if the air and water are safe, and if it's not, to ensure it gets cleaned up. Yet now, because of budget cuts and political interference from the White House, all of that is at risk.

**As our country deals with the direct negative effects of the climate crisis through hurricanes Harvey and Irma, we cannot afford to cut back on a vital agency** that has the power to help protect some of our most vulnerable communities and help them get the just, equitable recovery they deserve. We cannot turn our backs on those whose lives, jobs, and communities depend on the clean air, clean water, and public lands that we all have a right to.

**These deadly storms are especially devastating because they are hitting the most vulnerable people the hardest**, hurting low-income communities and communities of color, and making more dangerous the toxic air and water many of these neighborhoods and workers face every day.

These hardest-hit communities live in a toxic zone that has been built out by chemical companies and the fossil fuel industry, from Corpus Christi to New Orleans. Texas has the nation's largest concentration of refineries. Already, the toxic chemical and fossil fuel infrastructure throughout the Gulf Coast are making families, first responders, and workers

sick, with refineries and rigs causing untold and unmitigated damage to nearby neighborhoods, to those who work them, and to those who have lived among them for decades.

Hurricane Harvey exposed these flooded communities to new risks as its winds & waters threaten toxic sites and Superfund sites in its path. All of these communities watched with bated breath, hoping and praying that these facilities didn't explode, leak, malfunction, or contaminate flood waters already polluted with sewage and waste. And they've been counting on EPA to keep their communities safe.

Unfortunately, that vital protection is now at risk. **Under Trump's budget, the EPA is slated for a funding reduction of 31 percent and a workforce reduction of 25 percent**, including eliminating the Office of Environmental Justice, the Office of Public Engagement and all 14 climate partnership programs. While Congress has restored some of that funding, the EPA still faces debilitating cuts.

And it's not just budget cuts that threaten EPA's ability to do its job. The agency can also be hollowed out by political appointees who make life miserable for people working there and then fail to replace them when they leave.

We're hearing of EPA staff reporting working conditions that are truly jaw dropping. They're being told not to bring enforcement actions against polluters, to rewrite and gut strong public health safeguards, to refuse to provide documents to the public, and to not create written records of what's happening inside the agency.

**Between the budget cuts and this political interference, the EPA simply will not be able to fulfill its mission — which means every American family, including yours and mine, will be at greater risk of breathing polluted air or drinking contaminated water.**

The hardworking staff at the EPA work tirelessly every single day to make sure that we can hold corporate polluters accountable for trying to cut corners that leave us with dirty air, dirty water, destroyed lands, and communities underwater. Their work is essential to keep all communities safe and healthy, protected from deadly and dangerous pollution.

When we need to know whether rising waters are contaminated and dangerous, we need the EPA. When factories or power plants release spills into our waterways, we need the EPA. When chemical plants catch fire in the wake of storms, we need the EPA. When kids in a

neighborhood start coming down with high rates of asthma, or cancer — and it could be any of us, your child or mine — we need the EPA.

There's a real danger that the next time we face recovery from a big storm, or some other pollution disaster, the EPA won't be there when we need them, because the agency will have been reduced to a skeleton crew.

**We count on the EPA for the health and safety of our families, and the Sierra Club will do everything in our power to ensure the agency can do its job without political interference.** We call on Congress and the White House to fully fund and staff the agency.

In the wake of these catastrophic storms, we need the EPA now more than ever. Congress and the White House, the American people have a message for you — let the EPA do its job.



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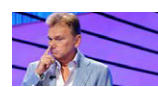
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